

Introduction:

A Comprehensive Plan for a New Century

Wellesley is a thriving, mature suburban community that owes much of its success over the last century to its commitment to planning. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as Wellesley became an affluent residential suburb, many attractive planned neighborhoods were created from farms and estates. The Town's leaders took care to direct and shape development in the Town. In 1912 the Town instituted a Town Building Law, which specified the size and location of homes to protect against fire. The Town passed a zoning law in 1925 and was a pioneer in the development of a planning board, a board of survey, and a billboard bylaw. The community's attention to planning for the future is one of the reasons it has remained appealing and attractive for over 100 years. As a journalist commented in the 1920s, the reason Wellesley was such a nice place to live was that they "planned it that way."

The Purpose of a Comprehensive Plan

This is Wellesley's fourth Comprehensive Plan. The first plan was adopted by the Planning Board in 1965 and, like many plans of that era, took a pro-growth approach to future development. The second Comprehensive Plan, prepared by the Planning Board and its staff between 1977 and 1981, emphasized growth management, conservation, and building reuse. The Town's most recent Comprehensive Plan was completed in 1994.

A comprehensive plan is both a process and a framework for future decision making. The planning process provides the opportunity for commu-

nity residents and others to articulate and review their values and goals through public discussion, agree on what they want the Town to be like in the future, and identify the key areas where the Town must act to preserve enduring character and to



seize opportunities to shape change. The framework is a guidance document that sets forth a set of strategies, tools, and specific actions to make the plan a reality. Recommendations can include zoning amendments, design and development standards, management plans, neighborhood plans, and similar initiatives.

Structure of this Plan

In 2004, the Planning Board and the Town agreed to update the Comprehensive Plan and to allocate funding for a two-phase planning process. Phase One was undertaken in 2004-2005 and was presented to the Town in April 2005.

The Planning Board commissioned a resident survey in early 2004 from Davidson-Peterson Associates and in the fall of 2004 contracted with a team led by Goody Clancy & Associates to assist the Board in creating a new plan. Phase One included the following elements:

- An Evaluation of the 1994 Plan
- Public Meetings
- Goals and Policies
- Housing
- Framework for Affordable Housing Planned Production
- Economic Development
- Land Use
- A Scope for Phase Two

Phase II began in the fall of 2005 and included planning for:

- Natural and Cultural Resources
- Open Space and Recreation
- Transportation and Circulation
- Public Facilities and Services
- Stewardship and Implementation

In Phase II, public meetings were held in the fall of 2005 and the winter of 2006 to discuss natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, and transportation and facilities. Background materials are available on the Comprehensive Plan website (accessed through www.wellesleyma.gov; click on “Comprehensive Plan” at the bottom of the page).

Accomplishments of the 1994 Plan

Wellesley has implemented a number of the recommendations in the 1994 Plan, particularly in the area of economic development. The 1994 Plan included an extensive public process, a large steering committee and assistance from consultants, and focused on how active the Town should be in shaping three future land use and development issues:

- The future of the few large open parcels remaining in Town.
- Changes in the village commercial districts.

- Accommodation of new needs and circumstances in neighborhoods while protecting neighborhood character.

The 1994 Plan acknowledged that the planning process produced valuable discussions about certain key choices facing Wellesley but ultimately did not result in a full consensus to resolve them. A large number of goals, policies and implementation actions made the plan very comprehensive but also obscured a sense of priorities.

Nonetheless, Wellesley can take satisfaction in having accomplished many of the goals of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan:

HOUSING

Three goals were paramount in the housing section of the Plan: protecting and enhancing the residential character of Wellesley; expanding the diversity of housing types; and expanding housing affordability for senior citizens and families with children. The booming real estate market since the late 1990s has tended to reduce the diversity of housing types and sizes in Wellesley and proposals to further regulate residential redevelopment and growth have not been accepted. It was difficult to reach consensus on affordable housing for families, so the plan focused especially on senior housing because it had more widespread support. However, a senior housing strategy was not created, as recommended.

Accomplishments:

- The Plan set a goal of moving from 4.5 percent affordable housing to 5 percent. The Town was at 4.8 percent in 2004, and that goal was met with the construction of 52 apartments in the Hastings Village 40B project.
- The recommendation to revitalize the Wellesley Housing Partnership was fulfilled through the creation of the Wellesley Housing Development Corporation, which has been leading affordable housing efforts.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Because the 1994 Plan was written when the region was still in a serious economic recession, there was a strong focus on fostering economic vitality in the Town's business districts, on ensuring the continued prosperity of the commercial villages that serve Town residents, on enhancing the Town's commercial gateways, and on planning proactively for redevelopment of commercial sites.

Accomplishments:

- Rezoning of the office park district on Route 9 to Dearborn Street.
- Rezoning to extend the business district at the Natick line to the Cochituate Aqueduct.
- Implementing a successful planning process for the MassHighway Route 9 depot site.
- Completing commercial district plans for Lower Falls, Wellesley Square, Wellesley Hills, and Linden Street, and partially completing a plan for Cedar Street.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

This section of the 1994 Plan was based on the Town's existing Open Space and Recreation Plan. The Plan recommended developing protection strategies for specific open space parcels and protecting and improving the water quality of both surface water and groundwater. Compared to previous plans, the Plan also added a more detailed consideration of cultural resources.

Accomplishments:

- Improvement and beautification project for Fuller Brook Parkway.
- Sewering of small lots at Morse's Pond to eliminate pollution from septic failure.
- Development of non-point source pollution reduction programs as part of the Town's efforts to comply with the U.S. E.P.A. Phase II Stormwater Regulations.
- Updating of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (currently in progress).

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

The major goals of this section were to preserve open space that is significant because of its size or its location; expand the trail system to link destinations town-wide; and provide recreation facilities to meet town needs.

Accomplishments:

- New Recreation Center.
- Active Trails Committee that has opened and marked new trails and offers guided walks.
- Trails Committee web page with trail maps.
- Natural Resource Commission web page with information on open space accessible to the public.
- Lower Falls Riverway Plan.
- Post Office Square Framework Plan.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

Improvement in traffic and parking management, pedestrian improvements in commercial districts, town-wide pedestrian and bicycle planning, intersection improvements at selected locations, creation of an intra-town public transportation service, and creation of a transportation coordinator position in town government were among the goals of the 1994 Plan.

Accomplishments:

- Improvements to Route 9, which are underway.
- The position of Transportation Program Coordinator, created by the Board of Selectmen.
- Route 16 streetscape improvements.
- Parking studies in commercial districts.
- Traffic calming projects.
- Tailby Lot Committee.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The Plan found that Wellesley has a strong system in place to meet Town needs for maintenance and replacement of physical facilities,

so the Plan focused more on program recommendations for seniors and youth.

Accomplishments:

- New recreation center and a Youth Services Director position.
- Senior bus service.

**Combining the Phase One
and Phase Two Plans**

This new Comprehensive Plan takes a slightly different approach compared to the 1994 Plan. Because Wellesley is a well-run town with a strong professional staff and sophisticated volunteer town officials, the approach is to focus effort on issues that are the most difficult to resolve, particularly (though not exclusively) those with multiple and overlapping board and commission authorities.

Part of the Phase One planning process was to develop goals and policies for all the plan elements, including some that were to be pursued in depth during Phase Two. The initial goals and policies for all plan elements are listed in the chart on pages 12–14. Some of these goals and policies, however, were modified after Phase II discussion. The goals and policies at the beginning of each chapter and summarized on pages 14–17 reflect the outcomes of Phase I and Phase II analysis and issues raised at public meetings and Steering Committee meetings.

This final document represents the full comprehensive plan update for Wellesley.